

Acknowledgements

Many local people and businesses helped with labour and equipment. The Army provided a barge to tow the whale to the Navy base where a shiplift was used to lift the whale out of the water for initial preparation for the museum display.

References

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Whale strandings in the Northern Territory II. Dwarf Sperm Whale *Kogia simus*

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In the late afternoon of 20 August 1995, a Dwarf Sperm Whale *Kogia simus* stranded on a Darwin beach. Several attempts were made to encourage the animal to swim out to sea but it kept returning to shore. The whale was then loaded into a hoat and taken out to sea. When the animal was released it swam off strongly, away from the coast. The following day, what appeared to be the same whale again stranded at a beach a few kilometres from the first. The whale died during further attempts to transport it by boat out to sea.

The whale was an adult male, with a total length of 2.1 m. The animal had numerous shallow and some deeper cuts on its body. These cuts may have been caused by sharks or crocodiles biting at the weakened whale, or occurred as the whale washed over rocks prior to beaching. A post-mortem performed showed no obvious signs of chronic illness. The cause of death was probably related to a small perforation of the muscle wall of the right ventricle of the heart, which could have resulted in leakage of blood into the pericardial sac and subsequent heart failure. The cause of the perforation could not be determined but it was likely to have been present prior to the rescue efforts. The stomach and intestines were empty of food.

The Dwarf Sperm Whale is an oceanic species with a cosmopolitan distribution, ex-

cepting the polar and subpolar seas, and is suspected to be relatively uncommon (Baker 1983). Outside of Australia, strandings have been recorded from the United States, South Africa, India, Sri Lanka, Japan and Hawaii (Watson, 1981). This is the first recorded stranding of a Dwarf Sperm Whale in the Northern Territory. The National Cetacean Strandings Database (Environment Australia) records only 3 other strandings of this species in Australia, all from the southern states.

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Whale strandings in the Northern Territory III. A mass stranding of Melon-headed Whales *Peponocephala electra* on Elcho Island

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During March 1996, JJ observed 40 small whales progressively beach themselves in a small bay on the north-east tip of Elcho Island, Northern Territory (11°45'S 135°54'E). Between March 21 and March 26 a group of at least 200 whales was observed to be active in the area. Whales started to come ashore as the tide began to drop at c. 12 noon on 21 March. By the end of the first day 6 or 7 whales had stranded and a few more stranded each day until 26 March. The whales would come close to shore with the high tide when some would apparently deliberately beach themselves. The other animals would move back out with the dropping tide but remain nearby, repeating the procedure on the next high tide. The whales that had not stranded left the area by
